



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
GRAND CANYON NATIONAL PARK
P.O. BOX 129
GRAND CANYON, ARIZONA 86023-0129



IN REPLY REFER TO:

L32 (GRCA 8217)

MAR 17 2006

Dear Interested Party:

Subject: Grand Canyon South Rim Visitor Transportation Plan

Reference: Request for Comments on Project Scoping

The National Park Service (NPS) intends to prepare a visitor transportation plan and Environmental Assessment (EA) for the South Rim area of Grand Canyon National Park. The EA will address environmental and related impacts that may result from actions to be proposed and alternatives to be developed to address the park's most pressing traffic and visitor access issues within the South Rim area.

In developing this EA, the NPS as the lead agency and US Forest Service (USFS) as a cooperating agency are required to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), which calls on federal agencies to consider environmental issues as part of their decision making process. NEPA encourages federal agencies to involve interested parties through a process referred to as scoping. Scoping allows interested parties an opportunity to make suggestions early in the planning process.

As part of this process, the 45-day scoping comment period begins on March 17, 2006, and will end May 1, 2006. During this period the NPS is inviting the public, agencies, and other interested parties to provide comments, suggestions and input regarding the project scope, issues and concerns related to alleviating traffic and visitor access concerns at the South Rim. Attached to this letter is additional information for your comment, including: *Background*, draft *Purpose and Need for Action*, *Objectives*, *Planning Framework* and a *Preliminary Project Alternative*.

The scoping process for this EA will include four public meetings conducted in an open house format during April 2006. Participants are encouraged to come at any time during the four-hour open house periods to visit informational stations, speak with NPS representatives, pick up written information and provide comments in an informal setting. The meetings will be held during times noted for each location. The open house schedule is as follows:

Las Vegas metro area, Nevada – April 5, 2006 – 4:00 pm to 8:00 pm
Henderson Convention Center
Grande Ballroom C&D
200 Water Street
Henderson, NV 89015





Grand Canyon National Park

South Rim Visitor Transportation Plan/EA Scoping Letter Attachment

Transportation Planning Background

Between 1985 and 1993, annual visitation grew from approximately 2.5 million to nearly 5 million visitors per year. In 1995, the park's General Management Plan (GMP) was adopted after an Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision had been completed. Many of the proposed facility modifications and improvements in the GMP were predicated on visitation increasing at higher rates than were eventually realized. Of importance was the GMP proposal to change the primary transportation system in Grand Canyon Village from automobiles to transit. The GMP transportation system proposed a large parking facility north of Tusayan, served by a shuttle bus system, and an additional parking area at Mather Point [now called Canyon View Information Plaza (CVIP)]. Under this proposal, 100% of day-use automobiles were to be removed from Grand Canyon Village and a bus shuttle system would operate year-round between Mather Point and Grand Canyon Village.

Through a 1997 Environmental Assessment (EA) and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) evaluating varying options for transit, the decision was made to pursue light rail as the means for transit, to locate all the day-use parking north of Tusayan, eliminate the Mather Point parking, and to operate the main transit route from north of Tusayan year-round.

During the time that the Grand Canyon completed the 1995 GMP and prepared the 1997 EA and FONSI for Light Rail, the USFS (Kaibab National Forest) was preparing the *Tusayan Growth EIS* from 1994 to 1999. The 1999 Record of Decision permitted the NPS to construct a transportation staging area on National Forest System lands with a transit corridor into the park.

In October 2000, CVIP was dedicated and the NPS was ready to release a Prospectus/Request for Proposals for the Grand Canyon Bus and Light Rail Transit System. However, due to fluctuating and sometimes decreasing visitation periods between 1993 and 2000, and the rising estimated costs of the light rail system, Congress passed legislation requiring the Secretary of the Interior to report on bus alternatives to light rail transit, prior to proceeding with a request for proposals for the light rail transit system.

The Report to Congress on Transit Alternatives (December 2004) evaluated five combinations of bus and light rail systems (Options 1-5), all of which would provide transit service from Tusayan to CVIP and to Grand Canyon Village. Use of the transit system would be mandatory for all day-use visitors. Regional Rail was also evaluated; the first phase included a high speed express train from Williams, AZ to Grand Canyon Village and a second phase included a light rail system from Tusayan to CVIP.

When NPS became concerned that the costs of Options 1-5 and Regional Rail were prohibitive, the NPS developed *Option A* and included it within the Report to Congress. Option A addressed some of

Transportation Planning Background (continued)

(continued from page 1)

the principles of the other options, but focused on the park's most pressing transportation needs and included an optional rather than mandatory shuttle bus system for day-use visitors. The projected cost of Option A would be considerably less than that of the other five options or the Regional Rail option.

The Report to Congress on Transit Alternatives was transmitted to Congress in June 2005. During Congressional briefings, NPS received strong support to implement an alternative similar to Option A, recognizing that additional planning would need to occur prior to implementation. In December 2005, the Director of the NPS approved the use of Recreation Fee revenues to begin transportation planning and NEPA compliance for the South Rim Visitor Transportation System.

Purpose and Need for Action

In order to guide the development of a range of alternatives and the identification of a preferred alternative, the following draft purpose, need for action and objectives have been prepared.

The purpose of the South Rim Visitor Transportation Plan is to provide a transportation system that addresses the park's most pressing transportation issues through the year 2020, or up to a moderate visitation growth threshold that will be determined through the planning process. The plan would accommodate current and anticipated levels of visitation to the South Rim, facilitate enhanced visitor experiences, and protect park resources. The system would be affordable within park recreation fee revenues, and will be adaptively managed to respond to changes in visitation through the life of the plan. This project will not preclude other future transportation systems from being implemented, including those that may be required for substantial increases in visitation.

There is a need for a visitor transportation plan for the South Rim that is flexible for changes in

visitation levels and travel needs through the year 2020, improves visitor experience, enhances traffic flow, provides adequate parking capacity, and improves wayfinding information. There is a related need to restore areas damaged by improper parking and to protect other sensitive resources when implementing transportation system improvements. Actions included in the plan are needed because:

- The long waits at the South Entrance Station, result in visitor frustration and poor visitor, employee and resident experiences.
- Visitors are confused about where to go and what transportation mode choices are available (for example, to see the canyon, to get to the visitor center, to find additional information).
- Directional signing is inadequate at many locations, such as the intersection of Center Road and South Entrance Road and along access roads to Grand Canyon Village.
- The Canyon View Visitor Center at CVIP is accessible only by tour bus, shuttle bus, bicycle or by foot from Mather Point. Consequently, many visitors never access CVIP, the park's primary information and orientation facility.
- The Hermit Road shuttle route frequently operates above capacity in the summer.
- Parking demand substantially exceeds capacity for private automobiles and recreational vehicles during current peak visitation.
- The existing transportation system is challenging for many users with respect to language and physical ability.
- There is inadequate parking for tour buses, even though tour bus visitation is substantial and is a growing component of total visitation.
- Although Mather Point is a premier destination for visitors to park, view the canyon and access CVIP, there is not enough parking there for private visitor vehicles. Visitors often park in non-designated areas, causing impacts to resources and resulting in safety risks. Similar problems occur at other overlooks and within Grand Canyon Village at some times of the year.
- Visitation along the South Rim is overly concentrated at some locations, limiting opportunities for visitors to experience solitude and quiet enjoyment.

Objectives

(not in order of priority)

- Reduce overall vehicle traffic in the Grand Canyon Village by 15-25 percent during peak periods.
- Improve the entrance experience by reducing long waits at the entrance station for visitors, as well as for employees, residents and commercial traffic.
- Provide easy access to information and wayfinding so that visitors have a timely understanding of where to go upon arrival and throughout their visit.
- Increase opportunities for visitors to use the park's transit system and other alternative modes.
- Improve or increase private vehicle parking as needed to meet current and future demand.
- Improve or increase tour bus parking to better accommodate current and future demand.
- Provide a variety of means to access CVIP to ensure that all visitors have the opportunity to receive park orientation soon after their arrival.
- Minimize new resource disturbance, and restore areas damaged by improper vehicle parking and social trailing in non-designated areas such as at Mather Point.
- Encourage best management practices to reduce or avoid resource damage, and incorporate sustainable design principles into design elements.
- Achieve an appropriate distribution of visitors within the South Rim to accommodate a variety of visitor experiences ranging from active and social to solitude and quiet enjoyment.
- Minimize existing accident risks at key locations such as at the parking lot and roadways near Mather Point.
- Manage pedestrian traffic and tour bus activity associated with train arrivals and departures.
- Provide support facilities as needed to operate and manage the transportation system, such as a bus maintenance and operations facility.
- Ensure compatibility with other future transportation options.
- Cooperate with gateway communities, agencies, tribes, and other stakeholders to achieve mutual transportation goals.

Planning Framework

The following sections comprising the planning framework are presented to focus the plan and associated analyses. The intent is to utilize previous planning studies to the extent possible and concentrate this effort on the key transportation issues requiring immediate attention.

Planning Time Horizon. The life of the plan is proposed to extend through the year 2020, or to a visitation level threshold that will be determined by this plan. Within this timeframe, improvements would be implemented and benefits of the improvements would be realized up to, or beyond that time. Should visitation grow faster than anticipated, other transportation system measures – outside of this project scope- would need to be considered.

Visitor Focused Transportation System. Any improvements at the South entrance station would benefit all users (visitors, employees, residents, businesses). Transit, parking and transportation management improvements will be primarily focused on visitors, however, all users stand to benefit.

Travel Modes. Travel modes considered for this plan would focus on bus transit and personally operated vehicles (POVs), but also would address transportation needs associated with tour buses, and Grand Canyon Village activities associated with the train (Grand Canyon Railway).

Geographic Area. The focus of the plan would be on improving transportation in the Tusayan – Grand Canyon Village area corridor, as this is the area where the greatest issues are found. However, some strategies will also be evaluated for outlying areas that could contribute to improvements in this area.

- Facilities such as parking, bus stops, bypass road, maintenance facility and housing would be considered between and including Tusayan and Grand Canyon Village.

Planning Framework (continued)

(continued from page 3)

- Transit Services would be considered between and within Tusayan and Grand Canyon Village, plus improvements to existing services on the Kaibab and Hermits Rest Routes.
- Transportation Management Strategies would be considered within Grand Canyon Village and extend to Gateway Communities and along major roadways leading to the South Rim of Grand Canyon National Park.
- Informational Services such as variable messaging signs, website information, printed media, etc.) would be considered regionally and beyond.

Cost

Implementation and operations would be affordable and feasible through funding from the park's Recreation Fee revenues.

Preliminary Project Alternative under Consideration

The Option A alternative (see attached graphic) from the Report to Congress on Transit Alternatives is considered as a starting point, or a Preliminary Project Alternative. However a range of bus transit, parking, and management alternatives will be identified and evaluated in the South Rim Visitor Transportation System Plan. Option A may or may not be included in the final range of alternatives.

Option A includes a large parking facility at CVIP, a parking facility north of Tusayan with bus transit to CVIP, an express bypass lane for buses and park residents from the Tusayan parking facility to north of the South Entrance Station and active traffic management to achieve traffic reductions and improve visitor experience. Use of the transit system by park visitors would be voluntary.

Phoenix metro area, Arizona – April 6, 2006 – 4:00 pm to 8:00 pm

Mesa Community College
Kirk Student Center
1833 West Southern Avenue
Mesa, AZ 85202

Flagstaff, Arizona – April 11, 2006 – 4:00 pm to 8:00 pm

Museum of Northern Arizona
Branigar/Chase Discovery Center
3101 N. Fort Valley Road
Flagstaff, AZ 86001

Tusayan, Arizona – April 12, 2006 – 4:30 pm to 8:30 pm

Best Western Squire Inn
Hwy 64
Tusayan, AZ 86023

How to Comment – This scoping letter, attachments and open house materials are accessible for review at the National Park Service Planning, Environmental and Public Comment (PEPC) website at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/grca>. Comments can be submitted at the public meetings, on the PEPC website, or in writing to the following address:

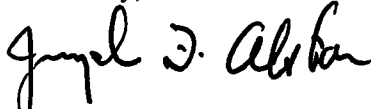
Superintendent
Grand Canyon National Park
Attn: Office of Planning and Compliance
P.O. Box 129
Grand Canyon, AZ 86023

The deadline for submission of comments is May 1, 2006.

Once the scoping period concludes, all comments submitted will be considered and a range of alternatives to address South Rim transportation issues will be developed. The public, agencies and other interested parties will have an opportunity to review and comment on the range of alternatives before they are finalized. The EA will include a detailed analysis of impacts to park resources from each alternative, including the No Action alternative. Once the analysis of all alternatives is complete, the NPS will identify a preferred alternative for implementation. The EA will be distributed for public review and comment before a decision is made.

We appreciate your input on this project. Additional information can be found at the Grand Canyon website at www.nps.gov/grca/compliance. If you have any questions regarding the project, or if you would like to be removed from our mailing list, please contact Vicky Stinson, Project Manager, at (928) 774-3026.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joseph F. Alston". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Joseph" and last name "Alston" clearly distinguishable.

Joseph F. Alston
Superintendent

Enclosures (1)

Please be aware that names and addresses of respondents may be released if requested under the Freedom of Information Act. Individual respondents may request that we withhold their home address from the record, which we will honor to the extent allowable by law. There also may be circumstances in which we would withhold from the record a respondent's identity, as allowable by law. If you wish us to withhold your name and/or address, you must state this prominently at the beginning of your comment. We will make all submissions from organizations or businesses, and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives or officials of organizations or businesses, available for public inspection in their entirety. Anonymous comments may be included in the public record. However, the National Park Service is not legally required to consider or respond to anonymous comments.

GRAND CANYON

Additional Elements

- Shuttle bus service will be expanded on existing bus routes to Village, Hermits Rest and Yaki Point.
- New Maintenance Facility will provide space for shuttle bus administration, maintenance and storage.
- Implement traffic management strategies.
- Day visitor parking retained in Grand Canyon Village.

Shuttle Bus Service

- Service between Visitor Center & Long Jim Canyon
- Operates on new By-Pass Lane and existing roads
- Voluntary for visitors

By-Pass Lane

- Dedicated to shuttle buses with automated access for residents and employees

Visitor Center (CVIP) Parking

- 450 Vehicle Spaces
- 20 Tour Buses
- Expanded existing shuttle bus services

Mather Point

- Parking lot and section of road removed and restored
- Pedestrian access improved
- New connector road to CVIP and Grand Canyon Village

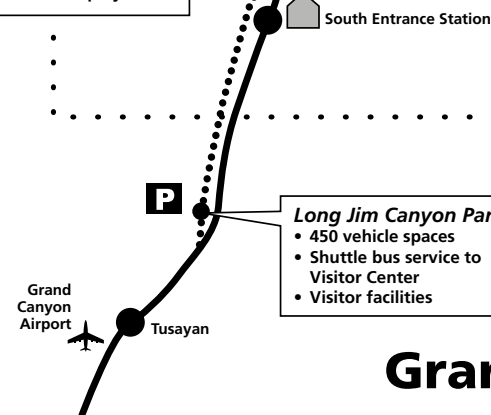
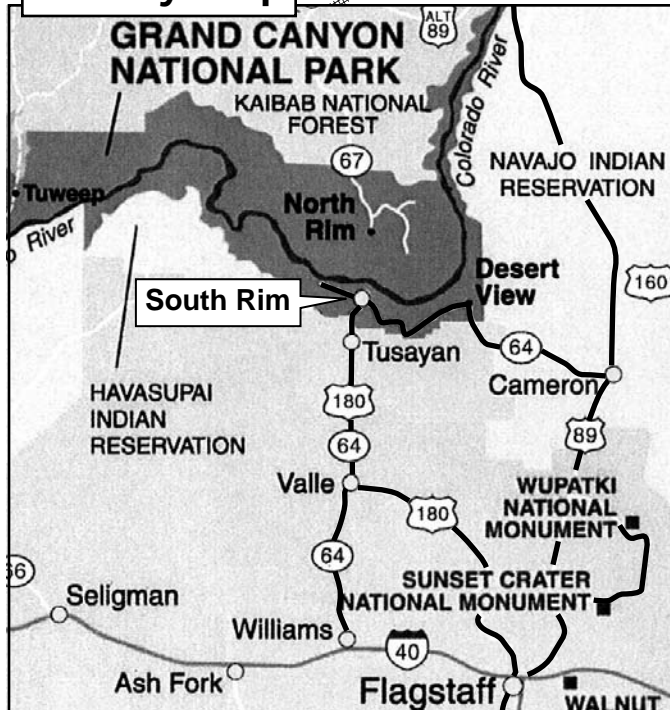
Legend

..... New Road

Parking

- P** Proposed Parking
- P** Existing Parking to Remain

Vicinity Map



This Map Not To Scale

Grand Canyon South Rim Option-A

Preliminary Project Alternative